We claim:

1. A method for screening to identify a selective anxiolytic agent comprising contacting a candidate molecule with the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor and the α1-$GABA_A$ receptor and determining whether the candidate molecule selectively or preferentially binds to or activates the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor as compared to the α1-$GABA_A$ receptor, wherein a molecule that selectively or preferentially binds to or activates the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor as compared to the α1-$GABA_A$ receptor is a selective anxiolytic agent.

2. A method for screening to identify a selective anxiolytic agent comprising contacting a candidate molecule with the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor and the α3-$GABA_A$ receptor and determining whether the candidate molecule selectively or preferentially binds to or activates the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor as compared to the α3-$GABA_A$ receptor, wherein a molecule that selectively or preferentially binds to or activates the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor as compared to the α3-$GABA_A$ receptor is a selective anxiolytic agent.

3. A method for screening to identify a selective anxiolytic agent comprising contacting a candidate molecule with the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor and the α5-$GABA_A$ receptor and determining whether the candidate molecule selectively or preferentially binds to or activates the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor as compared to the α5-$GABA_A$ receptor, wherein a molecule that selectively or preferentially binds to or activates the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor as compared to the α5-$GABA_A$ receptor is a selective anxiolytic agent.

4. A selective anxiolytic agent which selectively or preferentially binds to or activates the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor as compared to the α1-$GABA_A$ receptor.

5. A selective anxiolytic agent which selectively or preferentially binds to or activates the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor as compared to the α3-$GABA_A$ receptor.

6. A selective anxiolytic agent which selectively or preferentially binds to or activates the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor as compared to the α5-$GABA_A$ receptor.

7. The selective anxiolytic agent according to claim 4, 5 or 6, wherein the agent binds to the benzodiazepine binding site of the receptor.

8. The selective anxiolytic agent according to claim 4, 5 or 6, wherein the agent binds to the neurosteroid binding site of the receptor.

9. The selective anxiolytic agent according to claim 4, 5 or 6, wherein the agent binds to the barbiturate binding site of the receptor.

10. A method of treating an anxiety-related disorder comprising administering a therapeutically effective amount of a selective anxiolytic agent and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier to a patient in need thereof.

11. The method according to claim 10 in which the selective anxiolytic agent is identified by the method of claim 1, 2 or 3.

12. The method according to claim 10 in which the selective anxiolytic agent binds to the benzodiazepine binding site of the receptor.

13. The method according to claim 10 in which the selective anxiolytic agent binds to the neurosteroid binding site of the receptor.

14. The method according to claim 10 in which the selective anxiolytic agent binds to the barbiturate binding site of the receptor.

15. The method according to claim 10 in which the selective anxiolytic agent is a pro-drug.

16. A method of identifying a molecule that decreases the ability of a non-selective benzodiazepine to bind to the α1-$GABA_A$ receptor but does not substantially decrease the ability of the non-selective benzodiazepine to bind to the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor comprising contacting the α1-$GABA_A$ receptor and the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor with a non-selective benzodiazepine and a candidate molecule and detecting the ability of the candidate molecule to decrease the ability of the benzodiazepine to bind to the α1-$GABA_A$ receptor but not substantially decrease the ability of the benzodiazepine to bind to the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor.

17. A method of identifying a molecule that decreases the ability of a non-selective benzodiazepine to bind to the α3-$GABA_A$ receptor but does not substantially decrease the

ability of the non-selective benzodiazepine to bind to the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor comprising contacting the α3-$GABA_A$ receptor and the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor with a non-selective benzodiazepine and a candidate molecule and detecting the ability of the candidate molecule to decrease the ability of the benzodiazepine to bind to the α3-$GABA_A$ receptor but not substantially decrease the ability of the benzodiazepine to bind to the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor.

18. A method of identifying a molecule that decreases the ability of a non-selective benzodiazepine to bind to the α5-$GABA_A$ receptor but does not substantially decrease the ability of the non-selective benzodiazepine to bind to the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor comprising contacting the α5-$GABA_A$ receptor and the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor with a non-selective benzodiazepine and a candidate molecule and detecting the ability of the candidate molecule to decrease the ability of the benzodiazepine to bind to the α5-$GABA_A$ receptor but not substantially decrease the ability of the benzodiazepine to bind to the α2-$GABA_A$ receptor.